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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [FJ](#)
SUBJECT: VISIT OF GENERAL ABIZAID TO FIJI

REF: SUVA 64

Classified By: Ambassador Larry Dinger; Sec. 1.4 (D) and (E)

Summary

11. (C) The Commander of U.S. Central Command, General John Abizaid, met with Fiji's Prime Minister, Vice President, and Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) during a four hour visit to Suva on February 25. In all his meetings, General Abizaid discussed the possibility of having the RFMF participate in the Coalition of the Willing in Iraq, distinct from Fiji's current military contingent in Iraq (134 troops) who are protecting UN facilities. Commander Bainimarama is all in favor of the idea. Prime Minister Qarase promised to bring it to the Cabinet for consideration at a future date. (The CEO of the PM's Office told us Cabinet consideration would probably not take place until after upcoming elections. He later suggested that the U.S. should consider resuming a bilateral economic-assistance program if it wants Fiji to join the coalition.) General Abizaid noted that effective civil-military relations, where the military is subordinate to the elected leadership, is a key challenge in many countries in his area of responsibility. He told Bainimarama that a subordinate role for the military is invariably good for the country and good for the military. Ambassador Dinger noted U.S. concern about recent RFMF statements that it might invoke a "doctrine of necessity" and remove the current government. Any such action, Ambassador Dinger said, would have very negative consequences for the bilateral relationship. End Summary.

Fiji May Consider Joining the Coalition
of the Willing in Iraq

12. (C) In each of his meetings, General Abizaid expressed U.S. interest in having Fiji consider broadening its role in Iraq. General Abizaid noted that RFMF peacekeepers are respected all over the world, and have served with great distinction in Lebanon, the Sinai, and Iraq (among other locations). The current RFMF role in support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) is very important. He hoped that there might be even greater scope for Fiji to take on additional missions of responsibility as part of the multinational force (MNF-I). The Coalition would be happy to discuss ways to ensure that Fiji troops have the proper training and equipment needed to fulfill these potentially more activist missions.

13. (C) Vice President Madraiwiwi said he could see domestic value in increasing Fiji's involvement in Iraq. It might

encourage the government and military to work more closely together. Commander Bainimarama noted that being part of the multinational force would allow RFMF troops to deepen skills they have honed over many years of peacekeeping experience. Bainimarama told General Abizaid that he submitted a request to the government of Fiji some weeks ago to send a platoon to the Coalition and talked to the Prime Minister about the issue on February 24. He asked the General to help convince the PM. In the following meeting, Prime Minister Qarase said the government has not yet formally considered joining the Coalition, but noted that he would bring it before the Cabinet at an appropriate time and respond "quickly."

PM's Office - The U.S. Should Make It Worth Fiji's While

¶4. (C) In an aside on Feb. 24, Joji Kotabalavu, CEO of the Prime Minister's Office, told the Ambassador that a decision on joining the Coalition may take some time. Elections may be called shortly, bringing into effect a "caretaker" government which could not undertake new commitments. If elections are held in late April or early May, a new government might not be in office until late May. (Note: Elections have since been called, and will be held May 6-13.)

In a follow-on conversation on Feb. 27, Kotabalavu noted that joining the Coalition would create new (terrorist) risks for Fiji and its tourism-based economy. He proposed that, if the U.S. wants Fiji to join the Coalition, we should "broaden the basis" of Fiji-U.S. relations, specifically by adding bilateral economic aid or trade assistance to the current military assistance. (At present, the U.S. provides economic assistance to Fiji only through multinational organizations like the UN, the ADB, and the Secretariat of Pacific Communities.) The Ambassador said he would pass the suggestion to Washington.

Civil-Military Relations

¶5. (C) In the chain of meetings, General Abizaid prefaced his remarks to the Vice President, the Commander, and the Prime Minister by explaining that Fiji and the southwest Pacific were not his areas of expertise nor responsibility. That is the role of PACOM. His major objective was to thank Fiji for its participation in a number of missions within the CENTCOM AOR. However, at Ambassador Dinger's urging, General Abizaid commented in general terms that proper civil-military relations are important for every democracy, including in the CENTCOM area of responsibility. The military has to understand, he said, that when the civilian government gives an order, the military has to follow. Vice President Madraiwiwi, who met General Abizaid first, encouraged the general to pass that message to the Commander. The Vice President said conversations he has mediated between the Commander and Prime Minister have been going reasonably well.

The aim, he said, is to "restrain the Commander's enthusiasm" (i.e. help convince the Commander not to take extra-constitutional action). Madraiwiwi noted concern about the RFMF demand for a census to be completed before elections are conducted. He said it is simply impossible for that to happen before the Constitution's election deadline.

¶6. (C) In his meeting with Commander Bainimarama and in the context of discussing Iraq and Afghanistan, General Abizaid reviewed the importance of proper civil-military relations in a democracy. The Ambassador then noted recent statements by an RFMF spokesman endorsing a Pakistan-like "doctrine of necessity" which could be used to justify action by the military against the government (see reftel). The Ambassador said that invoking such a doctrine to remove a democratically elected government would have a very negative impact on U.S.-Fiji relations and could lead to a suspension of U.S. military assistance under current U.S. laws. Bainimarama responded that the RFMF does not intend to take any action against the government, but the recent statements are meant to warn the government that the option of military action is available if the government continues to behave improperly. "I can work with the ruling government," he said, "all they

have to do is clean up their act." General Abizaid responded that one of the basic principles of a professional military is to accept a role subordinate to the government. Over time, such a role is invariably good for the country and for the military.

¶17. (C) Prime Minister Qarase did not specifically raise his troubled relations with Commander Bainimarama and referred to civil-military relations only obliquely by noting that democracy continues to be tested in Fiji.

Comment

¶18. (C) General Abizaid's brief visit accomplished two important U.S. goals. The General made clear to Fiji's civilian leadership the U.S. interest in having Fiji consider joining the Coalition of the Willing, and our willingness to discuss modalities. The General also delivered to Commodore Bainimarama a clear message about the proper, subordinate role of the military in any democratic state. Bainimarama had heard that message before, but in the current dicey military-civilian climate of Fiji it bore repeating.

¶19. (U) CENTCOM cleared this message.

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